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The Way We Live Elke Erb

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Elke Erb

THE WAY WE LIVE

On the day of Epiphany, the guests arrived. The door was open, the lock broken, I had not heard a thing. I just happened to go out into the hall as the cuckoo clock struck, and there they were. When I, pleased and confused, held the living room door open for them, one of the walls had caved in over sideboard and rug and screamed with all its pink-underwear paint, with a sharp smell of lime. I accompanied the big-eyed guests to the bedroom, but the lamps broke loose and jumped at our legs like dogs and onto the beds like cats. We went back to the kitchen. The stove had taken center-stage, addressing the populace. The table was clamping its legs together in panic. The cabinet, pale, with a pinched smile. Anywhere, anywhere out of here. The bathroom wouldn't open, had locked itself in. Now it'll eat my cosmetics again, I thought, annoyed. We looked at the toilet. It was having fun filling up, pulling the handle, flushing, waiting happily, flushing—we were startled each time. How sorry I felt for the visitors in all this chaos. The basement, which we still had hopes for, had stuffed itself with wood shavings and was groaning. As we climbed up to the attic, blue swings kept swinging through the stairwell, chasing us off. Remained the yard. So there we stood in a circle, in the yard, and around us, tall and dark, the night. Snow started to fall on my guests who turned to leave. Nice of you to come, I said. Why don't you take my bicycle? It'll find its way back on its own.

Translated from the German by **Rosmarie Waldrop**